

News from Rep. Stephanie Herseth

For Immediate Release

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HERSETH: SENIORS DESERVE MORE TIME TO MAKE INFORMED CHOICE WITH NEW PRESCRIPTION DRUG PLAN

Pushes Bill to Extend Enrollment Period for Medicare Part D

December 12, 2005, Washington, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Stephanie Herseth is supporting legislation to give seniors in South Dakota and across the country more time to enroll in the new and complicated Medicare “Part D” prescription drug plan. Herseth has heard from seniors across the state who believe that the program’s complexity makes it difficult to make an informed decision. In South Dakota alone, there are 17 companies offering 41 different plans, with monthly premiums ranging from \$1.87 to \$99.90 (CMS, 9/30/05).

Herseth is a cosponsor of the Medicare Informed Choice Act, which would delay a late-enrollment penalty, prevent beneficiaries from losing their employer-based coverage, and allow seniors to switch plans if they make a mistake.

Herseth said, “Decisions about one’s personal health and wellbeing are among the most important decisions a person can make. Certainly, these decisions should not be rushed or forced to be made with incomplete or confusing information. It makes sense to extend the enrollment period for Part D and to give seniors and people with disabilities ample time to make an informed choice about their Medicare drug plan.”

Late last week, Herseth took the lead on what is known as a discharge petition to force a vote on the bill on the House Floor. If 218 members of Congress sign the petition, the bill automatically is sent to the House floor for a vote.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation’s poll taken last month, 61% of elderly beneficiaries

nationwide say they don't understand the benefit, only 1 in 5 seniors planned to enroll, and 39% say the Medicare drug benefit won't help them personally. More than 120,000 South Dakotans receive Medicare benefits.

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Congresswoman Stephanie Herseth serves South Dakota in the U.S. House of Representatives. She is a member of the Blue Dog Coalition, a group of moderate Democrats committed to fiscal discipline and strong national security, and is co-chair of the Rural Working Group, which is dedicated to raising the profile of issues important to rural America. She also serves on three committees vital to South Dakota's interests: Agriculture, Veterans' Affairs and Resources.